



MUSIC

GET TO KNOW: **BALMING TIGER**

by [Alex Brzezicka](#)

Balming Tiger serves the kooky K-Pop revolution we've been waiting for.

Balming Tiger believes in the impossible. The South Korean alternative K-pop and art collective is here to convince us that the only way to the upgraded reality is to be unique and true to yourself: with time, the good karma will bounce back and expand. That manifesto took them out of their country and pushed straight up international charts and – a recently finished – UK tour. In 2019 the track 'Armadillo', a joyful ballad video madness, got them Music Video of the Year at the 2020 Korean Hip-Hop Awards. Today, they've grown into a cultural experiment spreading positive energy through the diverse fandom: K-pop idol fans, funk freaks and electronic new wave heads.

Today, we obsessed over their later double-single 'JUST FUN!/LOOP', a digital footprint of easy-going genius. There's no other ground like them. Always genuine and unapologetic in everything they do, Balming Tiger sharpens their claws to attack the mainstream music world with first-class explosive mixes. Sassy in their approach, they're true sweethearts at heart dedicated to the paradoxically more cliché and tricky mission there is: to make the world a better place. One smile equals one step further on their happy quest. We talked to the collective to get some guidance on how to contribute to their grand manoeuvres and show the full spectrum of South Korean talent. Before blasting their music, we recommend sitting tight and buckling up. There's no known gravity to their stuff. Everything free floats in a breathtaking intergalactic space.

With the K-POP going globally, Korean artists are getting more international traction, what do you think about that sudden hype? Can you feel it in your fanbase?

Omega Sapien: Of course. Korea is a very good market. When I see my friends from other countries who are super big, they are big just in their own country only. Korea is different. If you are famous in Korea, you are automatically famous in Japan, China, Thailand or Malaysia, and even the UK or US. It's a great market right now. We're super blessed to be an artist in this era.

Balming Tiger is pretty much a self-serving group, from performers, and producers to visuals. How come you've decided to act rather as a collective than a band?

San Yawn: It came naturally to us. Luckily, we have a lot of talented people around us and they're good friends of ours, so we were working with them. Eventually, it became something of a collective. We didn't have any restrictions on what type of person can be in this team. You're more than welcome if you're good at your work and match our energy.

What kind of energy is Balming Tiger then? If you were to label yourself, what would you say?

Seoul The Soloist: Digital shamanism.

sogumm: Balming Tiger is a bit more than crew or a collective for me. It's more like a family since I value this group and these people so much. I would be consciously watching if I'm not giving out negative energy or negative attitude. It helps me to become a better person as well. We've got this song, 'Trust Yourself, which is not released yet. The song is about trusting yourself. It's an easy answer but it's very hard to combine because there are so many distractions that we have in this world. I want to make more meaningful songs like that, give them energy so it'll come back to us multiplied.

How do Korea and the creative community you're surrounded by influence your music?

Balming Tiger: There are not that many Korean creatives that inspire us but creative collectives in Korea do. Not only just music but we also take inspiration from people who are doing fine arts, fashion or cinematography.

Eclectic influences. It's always good to be inspired by different sources.

Omega Sapien: Definitely different sources but I believe all art is connected to one thing. If you're good at music, you're gonna be good at fashion. It all sits on the same bench.



There's like one spiritual art source that you can use for anything. What are you using it on right now?

Omega Sapien: Before going to SXSW, we did not have songs for that. We all got together and rented Airbnb, in the middle of nowhere, in the mountain. We were there for a week, putting out songs, quickly. That was the first time doing something like that. It was usually a producer, and the vocalist would meet up, make a song and send us on a group chat, and we'd be like 'oh this is good'. That time was almost like a retreat. We made so many songs there. Based on them, we're trying to make an album. Hopefully this year.

Have you got any concept for that album?

Omega Sapien: It's only a sketch of a sketch so we just have a vague idea of it but probably the things that we all agree on like positive and good energy, helping other people, love is our mission, no war.

sogumm: Trusting the power of thought.

Omega, you've recently released 'Wrecker', how was working on it and collaborating with Sega Bodega and VERNON?

Omega Sapien: It was a fun one because VERNON from Seventeen, he's a massive pop star in Korea, an idol pop star, and Sega Bodega is like a king of leftfield pop right now. I can't imagine having both of them on the same album. Besides me, it was not going to happen. VERNON was always a friend so when I asked for a feature, he did it for me. [...] This is bridging the gap between k-pop and leftfield 'hip music'. My goal was always: if I do a show 50% of k-pop fans and the other 50% of these leftfield Pitchfork people. All of them mixed in together in the crowd. That's my goal. That's bridging the gap. The K-pop fanbase is quite distinct. Balming Tiger is an alternative k-pop group. We're here to show a different spectrum of Korean music.

Your last single 'JUST FUN!/LOOP' is a cool explosive mix. Can you tell me a bit about the concept behind it?

Omega Sapien: We wanted to make a song that all of our members could jump on but it's quite a difficult one because we have such different distinctive styles of music. Sogumm is chill, peaceful, dark, and childish, almost like a Korean folk song. bjwnjn is more like a sexier, groovy, R&B and Mudd the Student is a punk/rock star. I'm heavily influenced by hip-hop music. It was difficult to have four of them in one track without sounding odd. If you listened to the previous tracks, it'd be always me or bjwnjn, not everyone in one song. We were trying out trap and getting beats from the producer and it wasn't working out so well. We were all at bjwnjn's studio and there was Prince's LP, Controversy. From that, we were like, maybe we should try some funk because he loves that shit. When we did funk, that was a perfect genre where these four distinctive people could all assimilate into a song very well.

It's a challenge to get so many different characters to work well together. Difficulties-wise, did you ever feel like the music industry is labelling you wrongly or do you find it limiting?

Mudd the Student: We're all getting some kind of marginalisation because I believe we're doing something unique. If you're doing something unique, there will be people who are not ready for it.

Omega Sapien: We don't really care. At the bottom of my heart, if you know your shit, you must know my shit is good too. Egotistical thinking, I know but yeah.

That's the only way.

Omega Sapien: But most of the people are supportive. Not much hate going on. Of course, when you post something, people would always write mean comments. Mudd the Student was already getting mean comments and now I started getting some mean comments and that makes me feel like I'm a star too. If you're not famous but an independent artist, you're only gonna get good comments because there will be only people that love you. When the hate comes in, it means you're getting more attention. Thank you, guys.



Making music is a great way to find out new things about yourself through expression. What has been the most shocking/interesting thing that you have found out?

Mudd the Student: I thought I'm out of touch with this reality, the mainstream market, but now I can see it and apply it to the songs, those mainstream aspects.

Seoul The Soloist: I always thought that analogue is always better than digital stuff but nowadays I think that digital has its advantages. I didn't know that before. The convenience and utility of digital are bigger than analogues.

Omega Sapien: The biggest thing is when I was writing lyrics, it's not very recent. I still make dumb songs, don't get me wrong, I love that shit, but when I was writing lyrics, it was a more technical and academic approach to the lyrics. [...] After doing that for quite a while, it was fun because it's like playing a puzzle, but now I try to just express my feelings more which is what art is supposed to be. I was too focused on technical and the academic parts of the song that I didn't think of my heart room in the song. Now, that I'm doing it, it's way more fun than before because it's like my diary while trying to implement skills I learned in past. I feel like I'm closer to becoming an artist every day.

Where do you want to see Balming Tiger in five years?

Mudd the Student: Winning a Grammy.

sogumm: Balming Tiger is not a music collective. I believe that we just happened to be making music. We're making the culture. I want to see how far we can go as a collective and push through. It could be film or gaming. Try out other branches during the next five years.

Omega Sapien: Or open a Korean BBQ restaurant.

What do you want your fans to take away from the Balming Tiger experience?

Seoul The Soloist: Wider range of K-pop and pop music.

bjwnjn: Positive energy to the fans. Great chi to the fans.

Omega Sapien: It is ok to be different. As cliché as it sounds. I recently watched a documentary about an evolution theory. There would be like 100 fish and there would be one mutated fish with two legs. Now, all the other fish have two legs. Then, there's a mutation with two arms out. My point is being different is the most beautiful thing. It's a natural growth. If everyone's the same, it's just going to be stable. Nothing's gonna get better or worse. It's going to be the same thing every day which I hate. But, as a group, a society, we like being stable, having people that look like us around us. If there's a different person, we might shun them or push them away. Those are the people that will make an actual difference. I feel like I'm like that too so I believe a lot of fans will love our music because we give power to that. I wish everyone realised that being different is a superpower.

Embrace it. Those people make the change.

sogumm: I want to make a song that people go back to when they're having a rough time in life. I have these artists that I listen to when I go through a bad time and I'm grateful for them. I wish my music could do the same for someone.

bjwnjn: We're not the artists because of some God-given power. I don't believe that. We're just true to ourselves. Through Balming Tiger, I want to show the world that you don't need a special gift whatever field you're in. If you're true to yourself, you can make it.

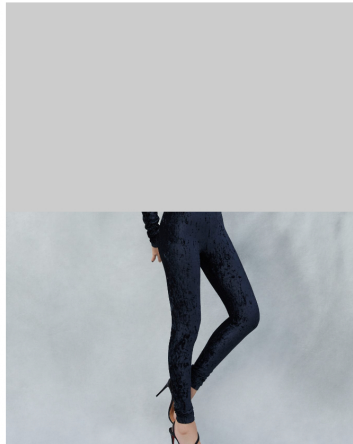
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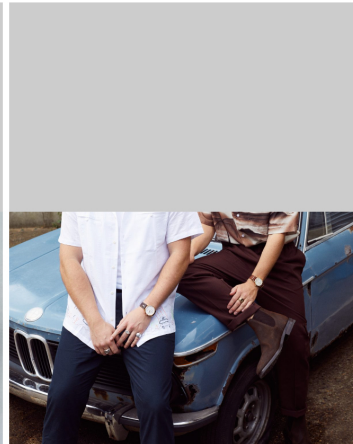
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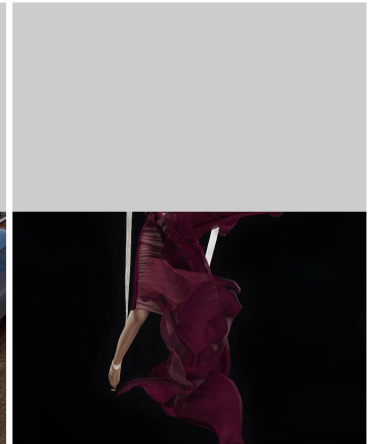
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